DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 377 166 SP 035 598

AUTHOR McCarthey, Sarah J.
TITLE Can Teachers' Images of Good Writing Conflict with Goals of Process Writing?
INSTITUTION National Center for Research on Teacher Learning, East Lansing, MI.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO NCRTL-RR-93-4
PUB DATE Dec 93
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Communication; Classroom Research; *Inservice Teacher Education; Intermediate Grades; *Teacher Influence; Teacher Student Relationship; *Writing (Composition); *Writing Instruction; Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS *Process Approach (Writing); Teachers College Writing Project

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the nature of a fifth/sixth grade New York City teacher's image of good writing, its effect on teacher-student interactions, and its influence on students. These three aspects are interwoven through a discussion of writing from personal experience, selecting a particular form for a specific audience, and including elements of language and style in writing. Students kept writers' notebooks and selected pieces to turn into projects for a particular audience, the teacher made extensive use of literature as examples of good writing, and the teacher established a time of the day devoted exclusively to writing. The teacher had participated in the Teachers College Writing Project for 4 years, which included extensive inservice training and on-site trainers in the classroom. Thus, the teacher had a particular view of good writing that included choosing topics of a personal nature, writing for a particular audience, and including imagery and figurative language. Successfully conveying her expectations, most students were able to weave these features into their writing. However, her image of good writing may have been powerful enough to interfere with innovative goals of process writing. Appendices contain samples of three students' writings. (Contains 20 references.) (JDD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 377 166

Research Report 93-4

Can Teachers' Images of Good Writing Conflict with Goals of Process Writing?

Sarah J. McCarthey

NCRTL

National
Center for Research
on Teacher Learning

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

2

Sponsored by the United States Department of Education
Office of Education Research and Improvement

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

SP035598

Research Report 93-4

Can Teachers' Images of Good Writing Conflict with Goals of Process Writing?

Sarah J. McCarthey

Published by

National Center for Research on Teacher Learning
116 Erickson Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 48824-1034

December 1993

This work is sponsored in part by the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning, College of Education, Michigan State University. The National Center for Research on Teacher Learning is funded primarily by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, United States Department of Education. The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the position, policy, or endorsement of the Office or the Department.

© 1993 by the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning

National Center for Research on Teacher Learning

The National Center for Research on Teacher Learning (NCRTL)[1] was founded at Michigan State University in 1985 with a grant from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, United States Department of Education.

The NCRTL is committed to research that will contribute to the improvement of teacher education and teacher learning. To further its mission, the NCRTL publishes research reports, issue papers, technical series, conference proceedings, and special reports on contemporary issues in teacher education. For more information about the NCRTL or to be placed on its mailing list, please write to the Publications Clerk, National Center for Research on Teacher Learning, 116 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824-1034.

Directors:	Robert E. Floden G. Williamson McDiarmid
Program Directors:	Linda Anderson, Deborah Ball, Helen Featherstone, Sharon Feiman-Nemser, Mary Kennedy, G. W. McDiarmid, Barbara Neufeld, Kenneth Zeichner
Director of Dissemination:	Cassandra Book
Communication Specialist:	Debra Peterson
Publications Clerk:	Tamara D. Hicks
Office Manager:	Brenda Sprite

Many papers published by the NCRTL are based on the Teacher Education and Learning to Teach (TELT) study, a single, multisite longitudinal study. The researchers who have contributed to this study are listed below:

Marianne Amarel
Deborah Loewenberg Ball
Joyce Cain
Sandra Callis
Barbara Camilleri
Anne Chang
David K. Cohen
Ada Beth Cutler
Sharon Feiman-Nemser
Mary L. Gomez
Samgeun K. Kwon
Magdalene Lampert
Perry Lanier
Glenda Lappan
Sarah McCarthey
James Mead
Susan Melnick
Monica Mitchell
Harold Morgan
James Mosenthal
Gary Natriello
Barbara Neufeld
Lynn Paine
Michelle Parker
Richard Prawat
Pamela Schram
Trish Stoddart
M. Teresa Tatto
Sandra Wilcox
Suzanne Wilson
Lauren Young
Kenneth M. Zeichner
Karen K. Zumwalt

[1]Formerly known as the National Center for Research on Teacher Education (1985-1990), the Center was renamed in 1991.

Abstract

This paper explores the nature of a 5th/6th grade teacher's image of good writing, its effect on teacher-student interactions, and its influence on students. Having participated in the Teachers College Writing Project, the teacher had a particular view of good writing that included choosing topics of a personal nature, writing for a particular audience, and including imagery and figurative language. Successfully conveying her expectations, most students were able to weave these features into their writing. However, her image of good writing may have been powerful enough to interfere with innovative goals of process writing.

CAN TEACHERS' IMAGES OF GOOD WRITING CONFLICT WITH GOALS OF PROCESS WRITING?

Sarah J. McCarthey

Process writing approaches have been described in the literature for well over ten years (e.g., Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1983, 1986, 1991; Graves, 1983; Murray, 1979). Features of process writing approaches usually include: (a) writing for authentic purposes and real audiences, (b) student selection of topic, (c) multiple drafts with revision emphasized, and (d) writing within a predictable structure in which teachers and students devote time to talking about writing. Despite the careful delineation of these features, questions remain about how effectively these approaches have been implemented (Applebee, 1986). The difficulties of implementing process approaches to change classroom norms within bureaucratic institutions have been well documented (Florio-Ruane, 1991; Lensmire, 1991; Michaels, 1987).

Sarah J. McCarthey is an assistant professor at the University of Texas, Austin. She teaches undergraduate courses in reading and language arts methods and graduate courses in research in reading and writing. Her research interests include classroom discourse, collaborative writing, and changes in teachers' literacy practices. Obtaining her Ph.D. from Michigan State University in Teacher Education, she is a former research assistant with the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning.

This paper was presented at the National Reading Conference in San Antonio, Texas, in December 1992. It will also appear in the *Forty-Second Yearbook of the National Reading Conference*, to be published in Chicago by the NRC in December 1993.

One of the factors that appears to undermine implementation of process approaches is the teacher's expectations or schema for students' writing (Michaels, 1987). Ulichney (1989) found that teachers' dominant interpretive frameworks influence students to match their writing to the teacher's expectations. What can begin as an innovation, then, comes closer and closer to resembling traditional classroom routines. These aforementioned studies focused on teachers who lacked extensive training in process approaches and who emphasized spelling, punctuation, word choice, and grammatical structure in their interactions with students. We know little about teachers' expectations in classrooms where there is extensive training in a particular model that focuses on literature and its connection to classroom writing.

This paper describes a classroom where the teacher had extensive inservice with a particular staff development model, The Teachers College Writing Project. It explores the nature of the teacher's image of good writing, its effect on teacher-student interactions, and its influence on students. These three aspects are interwoven through a discussion of (a) writing from personal experience, (b) selecting a particular form for a specific audience, and (c) including elements of language and style in writing. The paper analyzes both the positive and negative features of the power of the teacher's image, raising questions for further exploration.

METHODS

The philosophical assumptions that undergirded the study were consistent with interpretive traditions articulated by Erickson (1986). The method of data collection was drawn from Bogdan & Biklen's (1982) approach to qualitative research.

Context/ Participants

The 5th/6th grade classroom was located in an elementary school located in a middle class neighborhood in New York City. The teacher, a female Caucasian in her mid 40s, had participated for four years in the Teachers College Writing Project, which included extensive inservice training and on-site trainers in the classroom to work with classroom teachers. The principal encouraged teachers to participate in the Project and allowed release days for inservice. Both the district and the school supported the efforts of a trainer, Ms. Henderson,[1] from the Writing Project to assist Ms. Meyer in the classroom; Henderson provided support about twice weekly.

During the period in which the study took place, Ms. Meyer had read the most recent version of the process approach, Living Between the Lines, where Calkins (1991) described writers' notebooks as "invitations to write" (p. 38) in which children, like writers, could generate entries, make notes, write rough drafts, use descriptions, or record what they notice about the world around them. Students could draw from these notebooks to create more polished pieces, called "projects," for eventual sharing with a wider audience. In selecting topics from their notebooks for projects, students should find "the meaning in the moments" (p. 74), and select topics that "feel significant" or "reveal something bigger" (p. 61). Thus inspired by this latest rendition of a process approach, Ms. Meyer set out to teach her 28 students (14 Caucasians, 7 African-Americans, 4 Latinos, and 3 Asians from both middle class and working class backgrounds) about aspects of good writing.

Data Collection

Data were collected over a five-week period in the fall of 1990. This time frame represented a meaningful unit of study for the teacher because she introduced students to notebook writing (Calkins, 1991) with the intention that students would select a theme or issue from their notebooks to revise for a particular audience, called a "project." Data was drawn from the sources listed below, while specific examples used in this paper came from an analysis of four students who were studied as case studies: two African-American girls, Ella and Anita, and two Latino boys, Miguel and Anthony.

Classroom observations. The primary source of data for this aspect of the study was classroom observations. As a participant observer, I collected observational data from field notes, audiotapes, and videotapes of the one hour writing period. This writing period included mini-lessons by the teacher, teacher-student writing conferences, writing time, and share sessions where students read their work to one another.

Texts. I collected all the notebook entries and projects from six target students. Additionally, I discerned the topics of 26 of the 28 students through class discussions and brief interviews.

Interviews. I conducted two 40-minute interviews with the teacher to gain information about the school setting, her goals for writing, her specific plans, and her perceptions of the students. In the first interview, questions focused on the teacher's goals for notebook writing, her rationale for having students engage in this type of writing, and the progress of students. The second interview occurred three weeks into the data collection. Questions in the second interview emerged from events that surfaced from the classroom interaction.

Interviews with a subset of the student participants supplemented the observations and teacher interviews.

Analyses

Analyses of the data were drawn from sociolinguistic sources that suggest interactions are governed by context specific rules (Cazden, 1986; Florio-Ruane, 1987; Green, 1983). From the narratives of the classroom which were developed from a combination of field notes, videotapes, and verbatim transcriptions of the audiotapes, I developed themes that reflected patterns of interaction consistent with "grounded theory" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

I selected the themes of (a) writing from personal experience, (b) selecting a genre for a particular audience, and (c) including imagery and figurative language by reading the tran-

© 1993 by the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning

scripts several times and highlighting key phrases, important events, and central ideas. I then categorized recurring patterns in the teacher's dialogue under these three themes. The categories of modeling, using examples from texts, assignments, and language cues captured the teacher's strategies in conveying her ideas about writing.

Next, I analyzed the writing conferences using both the videotape and the audiotape data and performed a systematic microanalysis similar to Erickson's (1977). The unit of analysis was the speaker turn, indicated by a numbering system that begins with the first speaker turn. Pauses are indicated in the transcripts by one slash (/) indicating a short pause and two slashes (//) indicating a longer pause. Overlapping talk is indicated by the use of a dash (—). Words that were emphasized by the teacher or student are underlined. Nonverbal cues, especially proxemic relationships such as distance between speakers, played a role in describing interaction styles (Hall, 1966) and are noted in the text.

To validate my findings, I triangulated the data by drawing from the teacher's interviews, the students' interviews and the students' texts. I searched for disconfirming evidence for each of the major themes. Additionally, I showed segments of the videotapes to several audiences of researchers and asked for their interpretations of the teacher's discourse. I refined the themes and interpretations from the ensuing discussions.

Classroom Themes

Ms. Meyer used many of the features advocated by Calkins (1986, 1991) in her classroom. Students kept writers' notebooks and selected pieces to turn into projects for a particular audience, the teacher made extensive use of literature as examples of good writing, and the teacher established a time of the day devoted exclusively to writing. She had a particular view of good writing that she said she had refined from an institute at Teachers College the previous summer. She described the course as an adult literature class in qualities of good writing and suggested that the same qualities could be applied to children's literature.

Ms. Meyer and Ms. Henderson communicated their images of good writing to the students both explicitly and implicitly in a variety of ways including: (a) use of their own notebooks as models; (b) selection of literature; (c) assignments; (d) use of specific language cues; and (e) through implicit messages during writing conferences. In communicating their value on writing from personal experience, both the trainer and the teacher read from their own notebooks. These entries contained personal, detailed information about their own experiences, family, friends, and feelings.

Second, Ms. Meyer and Ms. Henderson communicated their emphasis upon the personal aspects of writing through the selection of texts they read to the class. They read several pieces to the class about relatives of both published authors and students from previous years. For instance, Ms. Meyer read a piece by a previous student, Tommy, about a memory of his grandfather and him at a baseball game. In this piece there is a physical and emotional closeness between the author and his grandfather. On another occasion, Ms. Meyer read the poem, "My Daddy," describing a birthday of the author and her relationship with her father who was divorced from her mother. Relatives were central characters in other pieces read to the class as well. The pieces the teacher and trainer selected to read to the class shared the following features, they: (a) were connected to the authors' lives, (b) were written in first person, (c) were about a relative, or (d) included a memory of childhood. Through deliberate selection of particular texts, Ms. Meyer and Ms. Henderson encouraged students to write about their own lives and people who were close to them.

A third way in which the teacher and trainer expressed their images of good writing was through assignments to write about personal experiences and to use figurative language. Keeping writers' notebooks rested on the assumption that students would keep records of their own lives and jot down and elaborate upon important events, people, and issues. The teacher instructed students to select one entry that had happened to them and embellish it by using "beautiful language."

A fourth way Ms. Meyer and Ms. Henderson expressed their images of good writing was through specific language cues. Because they believed that students wrote better pieces when they wrote about their own lives, they used a phrase called "getting to the bottom of something" as a metaphor for having students write about important events or issues in their lives. In both whole group discussions and her conferences with students, Ms. Meyer used the word "important" frequently. Ms. Meyer conveyed to students a value on revealing deeply personal, moving, emotional experiences or writing about people with whom they had a close bond. To express her value on using figurative language, Ms. Meyer and the trainer used such expressions as "description" and "detail." Ms. Meyer also communicated her value on good writing through her conferences with individual children. Examples of these are provided in each of the themes characterizing her view of good writing. In Ms. Meyer's view, good writing (a) comes from personal experience, (b) takes on a particular form for a particular audience, and (c) uses elements of style such as imagery and figurative language.

The Best Topics Come from Personal Experience

Ms. Meyer strongly believed that children should write about issues with which they are very familiar. For her, this meant that children should write from personal experience and write "true" stories rather than fiction. This belief underlay Ms. Meyer's rationale for having students keep writers' notebooks:

> Well, I think what I want from them is to be able to just get them to become chroniclers of life, of their lives. I think for me the most important thing is that I give them this gift of being able to observe their lives and to look at themselves and what they're doing and their place in the world and be able to keep track of that. . . . I think it's really a very nice gift to be able to give children—to teach them to be observers and recorders of their lives and the lives around them. That's what I really hope that they'll get, that they'll take always with them, that this gift will last forever.

Ms. Meyer believed that through the notebooks students could record their own lives. Part of her rationale for providing this opportunity for children reflected her sadness that she had not chronicled her own life:

> I think one of the saddest things in my life is that I never wrote down all of these things that I thought I would always remember but that I didn't. I'm very envious of people who always do, who wrote in notebooks and kept their feelings. They chronicled their lives and just had it for whatever reasons, whether they never looked at it or whether they always looked at it.

Ms. Meyer believed so strongly in children writing about their own lives that she discouraged students from writing fiction until they were well-grounded in writing from personal experience. She did not want students to write fiction in her class because she believed that: (a) students wrote better pieces when they wrote about their own lives and (b) she could not monitor their writing nor teach them the qualities of good writing using fiction. Ms. Meyer expressed her belief that it was necessary to explicitly teach fiction writing in the second interview:

> There's no way to model them, there's no way to get them to understand what qualities of good fiction are. They get out of hand so if you're going to let them do that, you have to study fiction first. You have to study how to develop a character; you have to study how to develop a setting; you have to teach them how to do that and then you have to model for them first—good, short pieces of fiction, good short stories so that they understand how to structure a fiction piece.

Ms. Meyer's reluctance toward children writing fiction rested on her assumptions that the students were too unsophisticated to see that fiction writing was based on "truth," the personal experience of authors. She believed that writers used notebooks to generate ideas for fiction, but that notebooks recorded events of writers' lives that could be used for development into stories. Ms. Meyer said:

> [Students] don't have an idea that it really is the same and that fiction writing should really be based on truth from their notebooks. In other words, nobody goes out, Katherine Paterson, [a children's author] nobody goes out and writes a piece of fiction that isn't based on truth somehow or somewhere. You know what I mean, and if they did do fiction, it should really have come, should come from their notebooks at some point.

© 1993 by the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning

Ms. Meyer felt strongly that students should base their writing on research or the reality that they observe around them. Students have to write from their own experience because:

> That's the way it has to be for young kids. Otherwise you get these stories about Ninja Turtles and that G.I. Joe is coming alive and about people living on the moon. It's not based in any kind of fact or any kind of research or any kind of reality. Whatever their story is about, they're not doing any research into the reality of the fiction, you know?

Ms. Meyer found that students wrote unwieldy fantasy stories when allowed to write fiction without instruction about the qualities of good writing. She acknowledged that students liked to write fiction, but she felt they did not learn anything from such writing. She said, "They [students] like to but they don't learn anything from it [writing fiction]; they never learn anything from it, ever."

An emphasis upon selecting personal topics and infusing them with deep emotion was also apparent through the interactions with students in small group or individual conferences. Often in individual conferences students revealed personal anecdotes or observations about relatives or people that were close to them. Dana, for instance, revealed how she walked to the park with her father, who was blind, and described what she saw to him and how she felt about the experience; Carl expressed his confusion over his parents' divorce; Sam talked about the differences between his mother and the woman who was to become his stepmother. Alexis became angry and discussed how she hated her grandmother and how much her feelings contrasted with Orlanda's relationship with her grandmother. Both Ms. Meyer and Ms. Henderson encouraged students to write and talk about these family issues. With Carl, for example, Ms. Meyer encouraged him to write about his feelings about his parents getting divorced and the resulting confusion. In the conferences, Ms. Meyer often made suggestions about how a student could write about one particular moment with a grandparent or a memory of the relationship between the child and another person.

Excerpts from conferences with several children illustrate Meyer's emphasis on the selection of personal topics. For instance, in her conference with Miguel, who suggested writing about a killer whale for his project topic, Meyer immediately asked the question about whether he were like a killer whale:

61. T: So you think that's at all/ you think you're at all like a killer whale?// [*questioning tone shows interest*]

62. Mig: Yes I do /

63. T: Yeah// So you think that might be a/ an interesting kind of/ project for you?/ Try to write something on/ take your entries/ and look through your entries and see where you find/ go through all/ mine it/ mine your notebook/ for places/ where you write about yourself/ where you really think you show specific characteristics/ and then work on the characteristics of the killer whale/ and kind of work that together?//

64. Mig: Sure/ [*with enthusiasm*]

Initially, Miguel had suggested an interest in writing about a killer whale. His entries reflected information about a whale's size, weight, and other characteristics. The teacher, however, was not interested in his writing an expository piece, rather she wanted him to write a piece about himself. Although Miguel had seemed interested in writing an expository piece, he became enthusiastic about comparing himself to a killer whale. The teacher had clearly influenced his choice of topic.

While Ms. Meyer's relish for students' writing about issues of "importance" or about people who were close to them was met with enthusiasm by some students like Miguel, it turned out to be quite uncomfortable for another student. Anita had been writing a description of her experiences at Lenox Hill Camp when the teacher conferred with her, suggesting that the piece was not very important. Instead, Meyer suggested that Anita should write about her father:

33. T: It is **so** interesting/ Anita/ that you talk about writing that because there are so many entries/ when I look through this/ I would have thought that the thing that would have stood out to you most would have been about your **father**// You have so many entries about your **father** in here // [*pace slows down*] (She reads from text slowly with feeling) "When I was living in Jamaica I had a farm/ We had chickens and my **father** has something like/ an idea to let the chickens"//

Even after Anita showed some resistance to writing about her father by finding other entries and seeming disinterested in the topic of her father, the teacher persisted:

51. T: Mhmmm/ I don't know// (sighs, long pause) I think you need to think// I think you really need to go through this book/ right? /Really go through this book very carefully and read it very carefully/ And take another color pen/ OK/ and underline/ all of the sentences in your book/ all of the places in your book where you think you wrote something so beautifully and that it was so important for you/ OK?/ Because I think/ Anita that you have **really really deep** and **important** things/ to say/ about relationships and about your mother and your father and I just don't think/ that Lenox Hill/ is the most important thing for you in here// If you decide that that **is** what you want to do/ OK/ If it turns that after this you can't find/ some big important idea that comes out of this for you that you would like to write about/ [*pace slowed down, former said very deliberately*] Maybe it's going to be wishing/ you know/ that your father were different/ that you could have more good times like the time in Jamaica //[*pace speeds up*] Maybe you could really really write up that time in Jamaica because that was a really good time/ wasn't it?//

With some students, Meyer was not as explicit about encouraging them to write about personal topics; instead, she implicitly discouraged certain forms of writing. For instance, when Ella told Ms. Meyer about the fictional story she was writing, Meyer ignored her comment and focused on the personal entries Ella had written about her aunt.

24. Ella: This fiction project that me and Serena are doing// We're writing we're writing these two stories/ and we've been writing them for (laughs) quite a while now/

There was a brief exchange where teacher and student talk about an unrelated issue and then the teacher said:

34. T: Okay so why don't you start/ take a folder/ okay//and on separate pieces/stick some papers in your folder/ and start lifting out those entries about your aunt/ and start finding the ones that really are important/ about the times that were really important//And start writing them in such a way that you think that they would fit in perfectly// Okay?/ (Ella nods) And then you'll decide how to put it in to a letter form to her/okay?//(Ella nods) That sounds like a nice project Serena/ uh Serena/ (laughs) Ella/

The teacher moved the conversation away from the fiction topic and promoted Ella writing about her aunt. From this interaction, Ella began to understand that fiction writing was not valued. She then focused on her personal writing and wrote a letter to her aunt that included many personal experiences. Like Ella, many other students wrote about topics of a personal nature. Ms. Meyer was successful in communicating her emphasis on personal writing. One measure of this success is an examination of the topics about which students in the class wrote. Of the 28 students in the class, 19 wrote about relatives—aunts, grandparents, great grandparents, brothers, and parents. Five students wrote about themselves—being dyslexic, memories of fishing, experiencing holidays in both China and the US, growing up in Africa, and the comparison between the student and a whale. Few students wrote about topics that were not of a personal nature. One student wrote a theme piece about feelings and friendship, one wrote a series of nature poems, and two students' pieces were unknown to me.

Selecting a Genre for a Particular Audience

A second aspect of the teacher's image of good writing was revealed through selection of a particular form such as a letter for a specific audience. Ms. Meyer believed that students ought to write texts with a particular audience in mind. This belief was interwoven into the class sessions—both whole-group mini-lessons and in the individual writing conferences. Ms. Meyer and the trainers used words such as "audience" and having a purpose or reason for writing. When students were determining the form their projects would take, Ms. Meyer

© 1993 by the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning

began conferences by asking students questions about form and function of their texts. For instance, she asked, "Who is this going to be for? Who do you think would want to read this?" to get students to think about audience. She also asked students what form their projects would take by saying, "What will this be?" and made suggestions about turning the piece into a letter to someone or a poem.

Ms. Meyer and the trainers supported the idea of writing for a particular audience by modeling their own writing. For instance, a trainer described writing a letter to her mother telling her how she felt and writing a toast for another occasion. Ms. Henderson explained how she was writing a speech for a large group of people about her experiences in classrooms. Ms. Meyer explained to a student, Serena, that she could imagine writing a letter to her own daughter to tell her how much she cared. Ms. Meyer had several favorite formats that she recommended to students—letters to a particular person and poems.

Ms. Meyer was often didactic in her conferences when she discussed audience. With Miguel she used several strategies: She asked questions, gave examples, and told him specifically to think about audience.

5. T: And the poem is going to be?/ What kind of form do you want this to take?/ How are you going to do this/ just on three separate pieces of paper as a project?/ Who is it going to be for?/ Who is the audience?/ Who do you think is going to want to read this?/ That is what you have to think about/who is the audience// Do you know what I am saying?/ Like some people are writing letters/ others are doing something else/ others are writing poems//You have to decide who your audience is going to be/ how you are going to present it/What would you like it to be?// Would it be an article like for a magazine?/ nah// Would it be a speech?/ Who would be interested in it/ you know// Would it be a talk? / You know/ you have to think / OK?//

Whereas with Miguel the teacher provided many different suggestions for forms and audiences, with Ella she emphasized the use of a letter:

23. T: So/ don't you think that/ what does that sound to you?/ that maybe this would be that/ that you have all those stories about when you used to do things with her?// Well what about if you turned them into uh/ kind of a letter to her// That would be a really neat project a real neat letter to her where you/ went on and on and talked to her about all the wonderful times as a way to say to her I miss you so much// Maybe in a way to plan/ a time where you could get together?/ Yeah?/ Does that sound like something you might want to do?//

Letters seemed to be a favorite format with Ms. Meyer because she also encouraged Anita to write a letter to her father.

57. T: So maybe it would be a nice letter to him/ "Dear Dad/ I remember Jamaica"/ and you know you could write this whole beautiful thing about Jamaica/ and "I wish we could have more times like that"/ You know/ Maybe that is something you would like to do as a way of contacting your father// you know?/ . . .

The concern for selecting a particular form for an audience was represented in the students' projects. Students used a variety of forms for their projects, often with a particular audience in mind. Several students wrote descriptive pieces about their relatives, while others wrote poems to be shared with classmates. Several students wrote letters to a particular relative, and one student wrote "an open letter" to the school community about being dyslexic. Two students picked up on the trainers' ideas of writing a speech and wrote toasts to parents who were getting remarried.

Elements of Language and Style

A third aspect of the teacher's image of good writing was the emphasis upon imagery and figurative language (Lukens, 1990). Ms. Meyer had strong beliefs about what constituted effective pieces of writing. Consistent with practices advocated by the Teachers College Writing Project, Ms. Meyer drew heavily from children's literature to form her ideas and to communicate her values to students. These images began to emerge both through Ms. Meyer's planned lessons and through the underlying messages she communicated to students in conferences. The elements of imagery and figurative language permeated the literature she read, the

discussions, and assignments she gave students. Imagery consisted of including descriptive adjectives, adding detail to events and settings, and avoiding the use of common words such as 'nice' and 'good' for the purposes of forming a picture in the reader's mind. Figurative language included any type of comparisons, especially similes and metaphors.

In almost every class session, the teacher, the trainer, and the students discussed the uses of language by authors and by student/authors. The teacher did not refer to imagery or figurative language by these names, but used such expressions as "description," "beautiful language," "detail," and comparisons. Both Ms. Meyer and Ms. Henderson referred to "getting an image in the reader's mind" as a phrase to connote imagery. Other specific language cues included [the author] putting "you right there" and "creating pictures" for the reader. The most prevalent phrases were "description," "beautiful language," and "getting an image in the reader's mind." Description was common enough that in one lesson it was used nine times.

When reading literature to the students, Ms. Meyer and Ms. Henderson pointed out particularly effective language. These examples tended to be filled with adjectives and details such as *When I Was Young in the Mountains*: "When I was young in the mountains, we'd pump pails of water from the well at the bottom of the hill and heated the water to fill round, tin tubs for our baths." Similarly, the discussion that followed the reading of *A Chair for My Mother* centered on two particular phrases: "But each evening every single shiny coin goes into the jar" and "Yes, a chair. A wonderful, beautiful, fat, soft armchair. We will get one covered in velvet with roses all over it."

Students' texts that were read aloud also provided opportunities for teachers and students to discuss description and adding details to form a picture in the reader's mind. Ms. Meyer celebrated students' use of imagery in their writing by calling attention to it and by becoming quite excited about the inclusion of beautiful language or comparisons. For example, when Anthony offered "the pineapple filled my mouth with joy" as an example of good writing, Ms. Meyer jumped up and said, "Oh wow! That's so great! The pineapple filled my mouth with joy." After Ella read her work about skiing adventures in the Catskills, Ms. Meyer responded:

> You know, it's so interesting. That's such an interesting ending. It almost sounds like that's what could have been, like Cynthia Rylant's notebook could have been like that. Like your line went from one thing getting there to the snow mobile, to the skiing, to the drinking cocoa. I could just see, I can almost see lifting that out and turning that into a picture book about going to a country house. And all the different things, being tangled in the trees and drinking the cocoa. It sounds great, Ella. Really great. And I loved how you described. Each thing you talked about you did such a nice description about the cocoa and about the sledding. I loved it. And about the smell of the pine. It's really nice.

In addition to pointing out examples of imagery and figurative language, Meyer sometimes was more directive. For instance, in a conference with Anthony, she employed a didactic tone of voice and gave Anthony an assignment to add descriptive language to his grandmother piece:

21. Now I want to see a total description/ I want you to work right now/ "My grandmother always wore loose clothes"// I want you to fill up this page now with descriptions of what she looked like// That's all/ and then show it to me// OK/ Just what she looked like/ the kinds of things she wore/ what her face was like/ what her hair was like//

Students' texts reflected her emphasis upon imagery and figurative language. Miguel used many comparative images in his killer whale piece (see Appendix A). Anthony included many images in his grandmother piece, using many adjectives and descriptive words encouraged by the teacher in his writing conference with her (see Appendix B). Likewise, Ella included specific images, detailed phrases, and graphic verbs in her letter to her aunt (see Appendix C).

Discussion

How can we make sense of Ms. Meyer's image of good writing, her interactions with students, and students' subsequent responses? On the one hand, Ms. Meyer achieved success with

© 1993 by the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning

her students. She taught them to write about topics of a personal nature, to write for a particular audience, and to include imagery and figurative language in their pieces. And many students seemed to have responded positively to and learned these features. For instance, most students wrote pieces from their own experience or about relatives. Miguel became enthusiastic about comparing himself to the killer whale and Ella became immersed in the letter to her aunt. Students also were able to write a piece for a particular audience. Several students incorporated imagery and figurative language easily into their texts. Through the use of implicit messages and explicit discussions, Ms. Meyer conveyed her intentions, values, and expectations for students. Most students were able to understand and weave these features into their writing.

On the other hand, the teacher's interactions with students in the classroom discourse raises questions about what the students really learned and the teacher's implementation of a process approach. For instance, with Meyer's emphasis upon writing about topics of deep, personal import, she may have been blinded to students using other genres such as fiction or exposition. In her zeal to get students to understand their own lives, she may have undermined students' attempts at choosing their own topics, thus violating a central precept in process writing—students' ownership of the topics about which they write.

Likewise, in her enthusiasm for students to have real audiences for their pieces, Meyer may have imposed her own values in what appeared to be inappropriate situations. Inadvertently, Meyer may have caused pain for Anita by recommending that she write a letter to a person, who it turns out, had abused her. Because of her enthusiasm for audience, Meyer's suggestions often seemed like assignments; thus, students were not free to determine their own audience or perhaps, to understand why writing to a particular person might be of value.

Her focus on imagery and figurative language might have been exaggerated in its effects on students. Ella's piece reflects some effective verbs and descriptive adjectives that help create a strong interesting letter. For example, her use of the word "drifted" adds an interesting detail to the story, while her use of the verb "wriggled" portrays a particularly vivid image. In Anthony's text, however, the description of his grandmother in the first paragraph that he did in response to the teacher's assignment, is excessive. While the adjectives do create a picture in the reader's mind, the comparisons of the gown to the sky and his grandmother's walk to that of an old man lose their power within the myriad of other details.

Influenced by her own experiences of text and teaching, Ms. Meyer's image was so powerful that it may have bordered on the rigid. Anxious to implement the new developments in the Project related to qualities of good writing and writing notebooks from personal experience, Ms. Meyer focused on those aspects at the expense of some underlying principles of the Project. In addition, the force of her own authority may have created students' compliance with her ideal rather than active participation through their own choice. In a sense, we can view Meyer's enactment of the Writing Process as an innovation gone awry.

The study illustrates that even with extensive teacher education and support, there is no guarantee of changing classroom norms. Teachers' dominant frames, as Ulichney (1989) suggests, have consequences for their interactions with students and for subsequent student learning. As exemplified by this teacher, teachers' images of good writing may be powerful enough to interfere with innovative goals and processes.

Appendix A: Miguel's Text

You know, when I go swimming I just get the feeling of being a killer whale in the deep blue ocean. Then again I feel like I am being followed by a shark, so then I get scared and I get out of the water. But thinking of being a killer whale, I then dash to the water without being scared of he shark. But imagining the shark, how fierce it would be, hurdling through the water, mouth open, wantin to crunch on my bones and rip my flesh off my bones. Boy that would be scary! But wait, I'm a killer whale so then I would be able to tear the shark's flesh and crunch on it's bones. With my 30 ft. body and the shark being only 15 ft., boy would I crunch him for lunch I would slap the shark on it's head with my great and powerful fluke, and let it swim away.

Killer whales can live up to 60-70 years, but guess what?
So can I!
I know, because I am going to exercise, swim [but of course not as fast as the killer whale], eat properly and I am going to be as strong as the killer whale, and as brave as the killer whale.

Appendix B: Anthony's Piece

My Grandmother Matilda

Thank god I still remember what my Grandmother looked like; she always wore loose cloths. She used to wear embroiderd flowers on her blue gown. It was the most Beautiful Dark Blue, more bluer than the sky. Her shoes were black with a Brown zig zag bottom; when she walked she limped like a man with a cane. Thank god I saw her because she always loved me I mean realy loved me. She used to play the pilion, a pilion is a kind of instrument that you pound and it makes a high piched ding that filled the whole niehborhood. I would play the drum and we would go to the park and have lunch and go to the hight's and have a ice that is called a piragua. (it's a ice that is shaved from a big block of ice and there are flavors that you have to pick and the ice is put into a cup and then the flavor in the cup and then you eat it and drink it. When you go to 181st it gets noizy and people come gushing in to the streets and they put out there tables and start to sell. it's weird when we came home it's different. in the morning people dont come gushing into the streets and you cant get the mouth watering flavor of the air and the frut flys hitting your face like a mist of water. it's so poluted in new york so you cant sell or get a piragua. my grandmother took me to kentucky fried chicken. it was the most oily good chicken and I almost ate the whole thing and the room looked like a lot of pigs just ate the time of there life and they were right. I remember when I was five years old and my grandmother was dying and I herd a scream that filled the whole room and gave me a chill down my spine I went to her room and I kissed her and huged her and she took me by the sholders and said that she was going to die and she cryed. my grandmother always wanted to see me get old but she dyed to soon.

© 1993 by the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning

Appendix C: Ella's Letter

Dear, Aunt Delores.

I finally decided to listen to you. Instead of running up your or Grandma's phonebill I'm writing you a letter. Remember those stories you used to tell me about when I was little. "I know" "I know." Of course you remember them. Well you're going to hear them again. My way! Here's one you've told me only once, you'll remember it once you hear it. Here it goes: It was snowing, ice covered the ground. We were on are way to the grocery store for Grandma. I had to skip to keep up with you. Snow drifted down onto my nose We giggled as we walked even though I had something else on my mind "mischief"! I waited for the perfect moment then wriggled out of your grasp. I ran with the wind and slipped and fell and sat there for a few seconds then burst out laughing. Meanwhile you had run after me and slipped and fell, almost landing on top of me. "Yikes" I said as I scrambled to the side. Your face turned red as a beet but then you started laughing. We tried to get up but we could'nt. Finally sombody got us up. You carried me there and back.

Sound familiar? There's your all-time favorite. Oh by the way could you and a few other family members come to my recital in June? I would really like you to be there and hopefully you'll meet my sister! Well here comes the story. It was a sunny summer day. I was staying at your apartment and we were eating breakfast. I glanced over to your plate and noticed that you had more sausage than I did. "I want some orange juice please" I said. I watched you get the juice. Before I quickly swiped one of your sausages onto my plate, you came back with the juice. 'Hey," you said "how come I only have 3 sausages and you have 4? "I don't know," I answered You didn't say anything else after that. I wondered why.

I love you and I miss you and I hope I'll see you soon.
though times were hard
and we were spread apart
I've always had faith in
you cause you were in my heart.
P.S Please write back.
Love
Ella

P.P.S I know you told me to stop growing, but I couldn't help being 5'2 1/2".

Notes

[1]All names of teachers, trainers, and students are pseudonyms.

References

Applebee, A. (1986). Problems in process approaches: Toward a reconceptualization of process instruction. In A. Petrosky & D. Bartholomae (Eds.), *The teaching of writing*, (pp. 95-113). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Atwell, N. (1987). In the middle. *Writing, reading, and learning with adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1982). *Qualitative research methods for education*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Calkins, L. M. (1983). *Lessons from a child*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Calkins, L. M. (1986). *The art of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Calkins, L. M. (1991). *Living between the lines*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Cazden, C. B. (1986). Classroom discourse. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching: Vol. 3* (pp. 432-463). New York: Macmillan.

Erickson, F. (1977). Some approaches to inquiry in school/community ethnography. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, *8*(3), 58-69.

Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching: Vol. 3* (pp. 119-161). New York: Macmillan.

Florio-Ruane, S. (1987). Sociolinguistics for educational researchers. *American Educational Research Journal*, *24*(2), 185-197.

Florio-Ruane, S. (1991). Instructional conversations in learning to write and learning to teach. In L. Idol and B. F. Jones (Eds.), *Educational values and cognitive instruction: Implications for reform* (pp. 365-386). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Graves, D. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Exeter, NH: Heinemann.

Green, J.L. (1983). Research on teaching as a linguistic process: A state of the art. In E. M. Gordon (Ed.), *Review of research in education: Vol. 10* (pp. 152-252). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

Hall, E. T. (1966). *The hidden dimension*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Lensmire, T. (1991). *Intention, risk, and writing in a third-grade writing workshop*. Unpublished dissertation. Michigan State University, East Lansing.

Lukens, R. J. (1990). *A critical handbook of children's literature*. Glenview, IL: Scott-Foresman.

Michaels, S. (1987). Text and context: A new approach to the study of classroom writing. *Discourse Processes*, *10*, 321-346.

Murray, D. (1979). The listening eye: Reflections on the writing conference. *College English*, *41*(1), 13-18.

Ulichney, P., & Gegeo, K. A. (1989). Interactions and authority: The dominant interpretive framework in writing conferences. *Discourse Processes*, *12*, 309-328.

© 1993 by the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning